

St. Paul's Episcopal Church
120 East J Street
Benicia
Solano County
California

HABS No. CA-2053

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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Architectural and Engineering Record
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ST. PAUL'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

HABS No. CA-2053

Location: 120 East J Street, Bencia, Solano County,
California.

USGS Benicia Quadrangle, Universal Transverse
Mercator Coordinates: 10.574100.4211710.

Present Owner: St. Paul's Episcopal Church, 120 East J Street,
Bencia, California 94510

Present Occupant/Use: Church

Significance: St. Paul's Episcopal Church and Parish Hall
constitutes a harmonious mid-nineteenth century
ecclesiastical ensemble despite the varying dates
of construction and extensive alterations made
over the years. The exterior of the complex is a
good example of the frame Gothic Revival
design. The wood-paneled interior appears to be
largely a product of the 1880s.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1859 and subsequently. The original church was built in November and December 1859 and consecrated in February 1860.
2. Architect: Local tradition credits Col. Julian McAllister, longtime Benicia Arsenal commander, with the original design of the church in 1859. McAllister was trained as an engineer and was instrumental in many church activities. S.C. Gray, in his 1876 "History of St. Paul's Church," stated that McAllister submitted plans for the original structure on July 26, 1859. In the vestry records of June 20, 1886, it was noted that McAllister's efforts "may be attributed to the erection of the original church edifice undertaken in 1859." These notes, made within living memory of the construction of the building, imply that McAllister actually had a hand in the design of the church. In a discussion of the construction of the Sunday school building (now parish or guild hall) it was recorded: "Col. McAllister designed the structure in 1883 and superintended the building." (Parish Register, p.21).
3. Original plans and construction: No original plans are known. The cost of construction in 1859 was \$2,061.30 (Dalton). It is difficult to reconstruct the original appearance of the church,

but it must have been a small rectangle with the entrance on the west through the tower. On the east would have been a very small chancel. The vertical dimensions and the detailing of the building, however, are largely conjectural. It is doubtful whether the tower looked as it does today with its steeple and buttresses, or that the nave was as high as it now is, since this would have overwhelmed the rest of the building. Very little of the original appearance can be determined from the building in its present state, since all of the external and internal surfaces seem to belong to a later date. It is altogether possible that the building originally had none of its Gothic details, notably the pointed arched windows and tower buttresses, and that it was a simple barnlike structure like a New England meeting house, and matched more closely in style the rectory that McAllister brought from New England in 1863.

4. Alterations and additions: Quite soon after the completion of the church, major alterations and enlargements were started. In the early 1860s a campaign took place that was apparently largely financed from the personal funds of the church's rector, James Cameron, with the work supervised by himself and Colonel McAllister. In January, 1863, the chancel was moved back and the transepts built. At this time, apparently, the steeple on the tower was also built. (Gray, p.2). It is possible that it was only at this point that the church became definitely Gothic Revival in style. Dalton wrote: "Mr. Cameron cut the chancel off and moved it back and built this center and these transepts, removed the plaster ceiling, put in those Gothic arches, put in a furnace, built the steeple on the tower and inserted the north and south stained windows. The cost was \$2500." It is clear that Cameron made the church cruciform by adding transepts and that he added stained glass to what was probably a church simply lit by clear windows, but what "Gothic arches" refers to is unclear. This may simply be the pointed windows or it might be the exposed rafter construction. This latter possibility, however, seems unlikely when the clear evidence of the 1885-86 interior decoration expenditures is considered (see Supplemental Material, below).

In the early 1870s another round of building was undertaken. In June, 1872, the organ chamber was added to the west of the north transept. In July and August, 1873, the church was enlarged by extending the nave to the west, 24' according to Dalton, and moving the tower from the west facade of the church to the northwest corner (Gray, p.2; Parish Register, p.20). In 1879 the church was raised about 6' to its present height and then was moved back from its site almost at First Street to the position it now occupies. According to vestry records of July 20, 1879,

this was apparently done by a Rio Vista man who offered to "move the church, put in new sills and board up all around" for \$500. By April, 1882, the Sunday school (now the parish or guild hall) was finished (Records of Vestry, April 11, 1882). Finally in 1886 the chancel was moved from its old location and a new chancel built. The old chancel was reused as the vestry north of the new chancel. Dalton is the only source for this information and he dates the move to 1880. It is fairly clear, however, from the minutes of 1885-86, that the new chancel was constructed at that time.

During the 1885-86 building campaign the present interior decoration of the church, at least in its main lines, was probably executed. The records on this campaign are relatively complete. On March 8, 1885, Julian McAllister reported that he had paid the carpenters to "ceil the south transept with red and white woods," on a design to be approved by the vestry. On November 26, 1885, Mr. Grey, the contractor, was authorized to finish the north transept and the nave after the model of the south transept. The chancel was also constructed and decorated at this time. Since the paneling throughout the church is uniform and continuous, it almost certainly all dates to this period.

The exposed rafters and braces present a problem. It seems likely that, contrary to local tradition, these were all added in 1885-86. In the church records of expenditures for this building campaign (see Supplemental Material, below), there are references to the "rafters and curves in the nave and north transept." The local tradition, that the wood "vaulting" was constructed by Scandinavian ship builders in the 1860s on the model of Norwegian churches, appears to be based on error. There is no mention in early records of any Scandinavian influence on the design or of any ship builders being involved in the construction. In any case, the exposed rafters and braces are almost certainly not structural but decorative, and were applied long after the completion of the structural system of the church. Together with the new chancel decorations they do not produce a highly original late nineteenth-century interior, but one that is very unexpected after a glimpse at the crisp mid-century church exterior.

The church has remained largely intact since the 1880s. In 1914, a new asphalt roof was placed on the building (Records of the Vestry, April 18, 1914). In the 1940s a new construction was made linking the parish hall with the church. This part of the complex contains a kitchen used for social events and a bathroom. At an undetermined date the west chimney in the parish hall was removed. The entrance door in the tower was moved from

the front to the side of the tower when land fronting on First Street was leased by the church for the construction of a gas station. The building is now painted white, but photographs taken early in the century show the church with contrasting trim.

5. Furnishings and windows: St. Paul's has been enriched over the years with a considerable number of excellent furnishings and stained glass windows. The original organ, a fine German instrument, was donated in the early 1860s (Gray, p.2) and was used in the church until the 1950s. It now stands in Grace Cathedral in San Francisco. In 1871 an artificial stone font was placed in the church. This font, designed by architects Wright and Sanders of San Francisco, now stands at the rear of the church (Parish Register, p.20).

In December, 1872, the chancel window, which portrays the conversion of the apostle Paul, was presented by Colonel and Mrs. Julian McAllister, and in 1887 a window commemorating McAllister himself was placed in the west wall of the church (Records of the Vestry, Aug. 21, 1887, April 15, 1888; Gray, p. 3). In 1888 the episcopal chair was placed in the chancel. In 1890-91 the pews were installed.

In 1892 the lectern was donated, and sometime between 1894 and 1900 the pulpit was donated to the church (Parish Register pp.22-23; Dalton). In 1972 the original altar was moved to the south transept. The lighting of the church was originally by gas fixtures. The gas chandeliers, wall sconces, and unusual disposition of lights around the chancel window is shown in the 1886 photograph of the interior (HABS No. CA-2053-12).

B. Historical Context:

The Episcopal congregation at Benicia owes its origin largely to the arrival of Episcopalians at the Benicia Arsenal in 1854. Services commenced with a lay reader, a major at the arsenal, in September, 1854. Services were at first conducted in the State Capitol, then in January, 1855, at a chapel set up in the Masonic Temple. The parish was established by Bishop Kip of San Francisco in February, 1855. At this time, Paul Hubbs, the state superintendent of public education, was named senior warden. He had come to Benicia in 1852 when it was the state capital and had served prior to 1855 as a lay reader of the congregation. A notable early rector of the parish, James Cameron, served between 1860 and 1864. After his brother's death in an accident, Cameron spent a great deal of his inheritance

on adorning the church. Dr. James Lloyd Breck, pastor from 1868 to 1876, was instrumental in founding St. Augustine's College for young men and St. Mary's of the Pacific for women. These schools were a major factor in Benicia's reputation as the "Athens of California."

Col. Julian McAllister was for many years a major figure of St. Paul's congregation. He served as the commander of the Benicia Arsenal from 1860 to 1864 and from 1867 to 1886. It was McAllister who apparently prepared the plans for the original church and was a guiding force in all of its subsequent transformations. In 1864, McAllister donated the rectory building and the land on which the rectory stands to the church. This structure reportedly had been built in Torrington, Connecticut, in 1790 and shipped around the Horn. McAllister was named lay reader in December, 1858. He was active in church affairs until he left Benicia in 1886.

J.H.D. Wingfield, born September 24, 1833, in Portsmouth, Virginia, graduated from William and Mary's in 1853. After attending the Theological Seminary of Virginia, he was elevated to the priesthood in July, 1859. In 1874 he came to San Francisco as rector of Trinity Church. When the missionary district of northern California was set up in 1874, Wingfield became the first bishop. He came to Benicia as the president of the Missionary College of St. Augustine and later acted as head of St. Mary's of the Pacific and rector of St. Paul's Church. Wingfield served as rector until 1890 and died in 1896. A window in his honor was placed in the north side of the nave in 1938.

Prepared by: Robert Brueggemann
Project Historian
Historic American Buildings Survey
Summer, 1976

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: A simple Carpenter Gothic exterior encloses a rich wood-paneled interior. The church had many alterations, growing by stages. The kitchen connects the church and the parish hall.
2. Condition of fabric: good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall Dimensions: The cruciform church measures 51'-8" by 87'-8", one story above elevated basement. The connecting kitchen is 10'-3" wide, and the one-story parish hall is 24'-6" wide and approximately 50' deep.

2. Foundation: Foundation under the parish hall is wood piers on stone footings. Foundation under church is concrete grade beam and wood columns on concrete piers.

3. Walls:

Church: White clapboard siding, corner boards, watertable, wood sill band with diagonal wood enclosure on the north and east sides, horizontal wood enclosure on the south and vertical wood enclosure on the west. There is an angle buttress at the southwest corner of the building.

Parish Hall: White horizontal wood siding with wainscot sill, below which is vertical wood siding extending to a wood sill band forming a watertable. Under the watertable is horizontal wood siding. The west side has board and batten siding with fish-scale shingles between and above the windows. There is a wood band across the gable and above the windows are two Gothic-arched panels, sheathed with fish-scale shingles. There is a wooden banded circle in the gable forming a quatrefoil with a cross in it. Vertical wood bands are on each side of the windows with infill siding between band and window arch of horizontal wood and half-round battens spaced closely together. The north side of the parish hall has horizontal wood siding, wainscot sill with vertical boards under the wainscot extending to the watertable.

Tower: Wood clapboard siding, divided into three horizontal sections by wood bands, each projecting over the one below and sloping on top. There are decorative wood brackets in the upper corners of each band. At the corners are angle buttresses of vertical wood boards.

4. Structural system, framing: Wood frame construction on wood rafters, with heavy timber columns and rafters at west side. Tower is heavy timber construction.

5. Porches, stoops, bulkheads, etc.: At the main entrance in the base of the tower is a concrete stoop, six concrete steps and black wrought iron railing on each side. There are eight wooden steps, closed string with vertical wood panel forming a handrail, that lead up to the choir in the north transept. There is a small concrete stoop, with fiberglass-covered pent roof, leading into the basement thrift shop on the north side of the church.

Parish Hall: A concrete stoop with two concrete steps and pent roof supported by wooden brackets is at the southwest corner on the south side. At the northwest corner on the north side is a concrete stoop, one concrete step, and a gable roof with a wood column at each side covering the stoop. There is a metal gutter and a downspout on each side of the stoop roof. Two wood steps resting on a concrete step lead from the exterior door on the east side of the parish hall.

6. Chimneys: There is a brick chimney through the roof on the northeast side of the chancel. A metal flue projects through the roof above the choir on the north side of the church and one through the buttress at southwest corner. A third metal flue projects through the high basement wall on the east side of the transept.

7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors:

Church: The main entrance to the church is on the north side through the base of the tower. There is a round-arched double leaf diagonal wood panel door with wood surround and wood threshold. A door leading from the choir to the exterior on the north side of the church is flush wood with wood surrounds. The door to the library in the basement from the exterior on the east wall of the transept is flush wood with a glass panel in the upper part, and wood surrounds. A door leads into the thrift shop from the exterior in the basement on the north wall of the sancturary. This is a flush wood door with a glass panel in the upper part and wood surrounds.

Parish hall: The parish hall has a door in the southwest corner that is hollow-core flush wood with wood surround and threshold. The northwest door to the parish hall is vertical wood with iron strap hinges across the exterior face, a small leaded glass near the top, wood surround and threshold. There is a door on the east side of the parish hall from a small hall that is four-panel mortise-and-tenon wood with wood surround and threshold. An exterior door to the basement is vertical wood with wood surround and concrete sill and is located on the north side under the altar.

- b. Windows and shutters: Tower: There is a single, four-light, pointed-arch, wooden window on the second level, north and east sides, while on the west side is a pointed arch wooden double window with intersecting tracery. The double window has a hood molding. At the first level on the east side is a

pointed arch wooden window with leaded stained glass, and a rectangular wooden window with leaded stained glass on the west side. The third level has a rectangular wood louver on all four faces.

Church: On the west side is a wooden, pointed arch window with intersecting tracery, stained glass, wood surround, hood molding and the exterior covered with plexiglass. There is a trefoil wooden louver above this window. The window on the east side behind the altar has a pointed arch with intersecting tracery, stained glass, heavy wood surround, with a fleur-de-lis at the pointed arch with intersecting tracery glazed with diamond-pattern colored glass. Other windows in the church are wooden pointed-arch casements with intersecting tracery, leaded stained glass, wooden surrounds and hood molding.

Parish Hall: Diamond-pattern wooden casement windows are in the parish hall and kitchen, with only one sash operable. East and west windows in the parish hall are wooden, pointed arch with intersecting tracery, leaded diamond-pattern glass, hood molding, heavy wooden surrounds and stools.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Gable roof with asphalt shingles.
- b. Cornice, eaves: Boxed eaves and cornice, metal gutters and downspouts, rake boards.
- c. Tower: The tower has an octagonal spire covered with asphalt shingles, and a gold metal cross at the apex. A lightning rod is on top of the cross.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: In the raised basement under the church, two rooms are finished, the thrift shop and library. The remainder has a dirt floor and unfinished walls and ceiling. Two rows of heavy timber columns are placed down the long dimension of the church. There are separate outside entrances to the thrift shop, library and unfinished space.
- b. First floor: The main entrance is on the north into the base of the tower. The church is a center-aisle cross plan with the choir in the north transept and a chapel area in the south

transept. A small alcove northwest of the transept houses the organ. The altar is across the entire east end. Northeast of the transept is the vestry, which leads into the kitchen, which connects with the parish hall.

2. Flooring: Flooring in the tower is wood blocks. The church has narrow wood boards with a carpet runner down the center aisle. The kitchen hall and toilet have vinyl asbestos tile floor covering. The parish hall has wooden boards.
3. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls and ceilings in the tower, church and vestry are wood board paneling. There is a vertical wood wainscoting with chair molding, above which is diagonal wood paneling extending to a frieze band at the bottom of the arched braces. The wainscoting in the altar is stenciled wallpaper with a heavy protruding molding, a decorative ceramic tile band and another heavy protruding molding painted red. Above this is diagonal wood paneling to the frieze band. Arched braces across the sloped ceiling come down to the frieze band and have decorative ends on each. The ceiling paneling above the altar is painted antique green, and arched brace chambers are alternately green, gold and red. At the intersecting corners of the nave and transept are square fluted pilasters with metal acanthus leaves and wood moldings forming Corinthian capitals.

Walls in the kitchen are gypsum board, painted with a wood board ceiling and exposed beams. The parish hall has painted plaster walls and wood board ceiling. Arched braces form a simulated wood truss. There is a vertical wood wainscoting with chair molding. The hall and toilet on the first floor and the thrift shop and library in the basement have painted gypsum board walls and ceilings.

4. Doorways and doors: Large rosewood panel double doors lead from the tower to the church. The wood surround forms a pointed arch. The doors are cut at the ceiling line in the tower, leaving a wood panel in the arch on the church side.

The door to the vestry from the altar is vertical wood panel with heavy wood surround. The head is a modified trefoil arch, with the center arch flattened. Wood panel doors with wood surrounds are in other parts of the building.

5. Decorative features: The pulpit has a wood base platform with a decorative brass railing and wood handrail. There is a metal book stand on top. The lectern has a center brass column holding

a book stand surrounded by three small brass columns and decorative brasswork. The wood pews have diagonal wood panel backs. The decorative ends have wood carvings and are topped with a wood fleur-de-lis. The communion rail at each side of the center aisle behind the pulpit is a large wood rail supported on each end by decorative metal legs painted red, green, and gold.

6. Mechanical equipment:

- a. Heating: There is a floor furnace in the church and parish hall and a suspended unit heater above the organ in the church.
- b. Lighting: There are reproduction hanging light fixtures in the tower entry and the church. A brass hanging candle is above the altar. Other lighting is modern fixtures.

D. Site:

The church sits on the southeast corner of East J Street and First Street. On the west side are commercial and on the other sides are residential buildings. There are several large trees on the site. A black wrought-iron fence is on the north at the sidewalk. Brick planters and several large palm trees are along the sidewalk on the north side. The rectory sits to the east of the church building.

Prepared by: John P. White
Project Supervisor
Historic American Buildings Survey
June, 1976

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Early Views:

1. Drawings and Prints:

Sketch plan of St. Paul's, late 19th century. Parish Register, St. Paul's Church, p. 20. This plan shows the approximate locations of the various parts of the church and gives dates of their construction.

Lithograph of the west facade of St. Paul's and the parish hall. Collection Mrs. D. Hanson Grubb, San Francisco. This view, similar to the first Stumm photograph discussed below, is signed "Moss Eng. Co., New York." (HABS No. CA-2053-10)

2. Photographs:

View of the interior, 1886. Collection Charline Erwin, Benicia. This extremely rare old photographic print has stamped on the rear, "M. Hall McAllister," and lettered in faded ink, "St. Paul's Church, Benicia, California. As decorated for Easter 1886. Photo by Captain Ayres, Apr./86." (HABS No. CA-2053-12)

Photograph of St. Paul's from the southwest, undated. Collection St. Paul's Church. This photograph has a typed notation on a piece of paper below it: "Episcopal Church, First Street, Benicia, 1886. Loaned by Mrs. Gerrish." It is probably the earliest view of the exterior of the building known if it does date to 1886, but since this was after the final building campaign, it shows the structure in approximately its current condition. (HABS No. CA-2053-11)

Stumm photographs, early 1900s. The jeweler Frank J. Stumm made a remarkable collection of photographic views of the city of Benicia between 1908 and 1916. In the collection of Emily Pines, Benicia, are three good postcard views of St. Paul's Church. These include a photograph of the church itself showing the west facade, but with trees obscuring the parish hall to the left; this is numbered J9085. A second view shows the west elevations of the church, the parish house, and the rectory; this bears the number 325. This view or one very similar to it has been reproduced from a print owned by Steve de Benedetti in the Solano County Historical Society Notebook, Vol. XII, No. 5, Sept. 1969. A third photograph shows the interior of the church.

View of the interior. Collection St. Paul's Church. This photo is mounted on a Christmas card dated 1906. (HABS No. CA-2053-13)

B. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Records of Vestry, St. Paul's Church, Benicia. Handwritten records in the files of the church. In the beginning of this volume is an account entitled "History of St. Paul's Church, Benicia," by S. C. Gray, parish clerk. This was apparently written and compiled in 1876.

Parish Register, St. Paul's Church, Benicia. Handwritten volume in the church file. At the start of this volume is another compilation of history.

Davis, Rev. Father Charles E. "One Hundred Fifteen Years of Old St. Paul's Church: Some Anecdotes, Curiosa and Factitiae." Mimeographed paper read at the Solano County Historical Society, 1973.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Erwin, Charline. "St. Paul's Episcopal Parish." Benicia Historical Society Gazette, Vol. II, No. 2.

Dalton, Alfred. A History of St. Paul's Parish. Benicia, 1905. Many of the statements in this pamphlet appear to be due to misunderstandings of previous writers.

Wingfield, J. H. D. Sermon of Feb. 28, 1886. Mimeographed. Records, St. Paul's Church, Benicia. This contains a short history of the building.

C. Supplemental Material:

Church Improvement Fund expenditures, 1885-86, Parish Register, folio 137.

DATE	EXPENDITURES	COST
Aug. 1, 1885	David Preston and McKenna for lumber rafters, nave and N. Transept	20.70
Nov. 12, 1885	Cash to Pringle 5 3/4 days work at \$4 sawing rafters	23.00
Dec. 19, 1885	F. W. Pringle for putting up rafters and curves in nave and N. Transept	41.00
Dec. 19, 1885	Crawford, painting and varnishing rafters and curves	36.00
Jan. 12, 1886	Wm. C. Clark, for brick mortar, and erecting chimney	36.00
Jan. 16, 1886	Thomas Westoby for building chancel	338.70

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DATE	EXPENDITURES	COST
Jan. 16, 1886	Charles Davis moving old chancel, underpinning and closing it in	40.00
Jan. 18, 1886	Cook, 5 1/2 days work	5.50
Jan. 24, 1886	Manly and Harrington, painting outside of church	33.00
Jan. 26, 1886	Brown on interior of church	6.00
Jan. 28, 1886	M.M. Sweeney, leaders and pipes for roof of church	12.00
Jan. 30, 1886	Gregory, 1 1/2 days work on interior of chancel	17.50
Feb. 1, 1886	Cook, 6 days work	6.00
Feb. 10, 1886	Sherman, Clay and com, work on organ	280.00
Feb. 13, 1886	J. C. McLeod, plastering vestry room and chancel wall	20.00
Feb. 16, 1886	Gregory, 8 days work on chancel	8.00
Feb. 24, 1886	Brown, 11 days work	11.00
Feb. 26, 1886	Crawford, staining and varnishing chancel roof and walls	30.00
Feb. 27, 1886	Cook, 12 days work	12.00
Mar. 2, 1886	J. C. McLeod, setting tiles	17.50
Mar. 2, 1886	C. B. Houghton, lumber	51.20
Mar. 6, 1886	Crawford, for staining and varnishing pews	20.00
		1,072.03

(Signed)

Julian McAllister, Treas.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with Exxon Company, U.S.A. (a division of Exxon Corporation) and the Benicia Historical Society. Under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of H.A.B.S., the project was completed during the summer of 1976 at the Historic American Buildings Survey Field Office, Benicia, California, by John P. White (Assistant Professor, Texas Tech University), Project Supervisor; Robert Brueggmann (University of Pennsylvania), Project Historian; Kenneth Payson (Cornell University), Architect; and student assistant architects Scott Barnard (University of Pennsylvania); James L. Cook (Texas Tech University); and Gary A. Statkus (University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign). The written data were edited by Alison K. Hoagland in the HABS Washington office in January, 1981.